

The American Veteran, Edition 6, Part 2

Jim Benson, host: Our greatest generation most now in their 80's many on fixed incomes or too frail to travel to the nation's capital to see the memorial built in their honor.

Physician's Assistant Earl Morse at the Springfield, Ohio, VA Medical Clinic saw this need and did something to fix it.

Morse: I've been caring for veterans now for the past 27 years. Last year one of the biggest topics of conversation here in our clinic was the final completion and dedication of the World War Two Memorial. I had asked my World War Two veterans if they have they been to the World War Two Memorial, do they have any plans to see the memorial? And that's when they break eye contact, and they say, "well, no."

I'm fortunate to be a private pilot, and when I shared my idea of possibly flying World War Two veterans out to Washington, DC, it was received better than I ever expected.

Rob Withrow, volunteer pilot: My father was a veteran also and he didn't live to see the memorial. So with these guys getting up in age, I think it's very important that we honor their service.

(Video of World War II veteran Jack Seipel, carrying an American Flag in a three-sided wooden display box while the national anthem is played.)

Morse: The flag symbolizes all the World War Two veterans from the Ohio area who have never seen the memorial, that will never see the memorial.

Seipel: My name is Jack Seipel and I was in World War Two, and I'm here today to go on the Honor Flight to go to Washington, DC. It's an honor to be able to go to the memorial.

Kathy Hirst, daughter of World War Two veteran: I just don't think there's any way my father could do it on his own. Even if we took him, we cannot provide the things that these people are providing for him.

Morse: This project is absolutely free for the World War Two veterans.

Seipel: I feel it's great. I just wish it could have been sooner. There are so many other people I know that would have liked to have seen this, and they couldn't make it. It's beautiful. It represents most everybody, every state, every battle that we were in, the people that have died.

Norman Hirst, World War II Veteran: I think it's wonderful. I really think it's wonderful and I firmly believe that every person that is a veteran of World War Two should be able to come and see this. Tell you the truth, it aches my heart because this wasn't 20 years ago when a lot of them that really earned it were still living.

The American Legion, Post Vice Commander: And my American Legion post, they asked me to bring a check to Earl (Morse) for \$1,000 to make sure this keeps on happening. Earl, thank you so much for what you do sir.

Hayward Smith, World War II Veteran: The ones that really need the credit for all this are these guys right here, the pilots.

Mike Elliott, volunteer pilot: It's been a moving, a touching experience just to see how happy they are to be able to finally come and see it.

World War II Veteran: This is the end of a nice, beautiful day. We enjoyed this. Thank you guys for everything. We appreciate all of your hospitality.

Airport Traffic Controller to aircraft pilot: Honor Flight Five, Honor Flight Ground, Welcome Home.

World War II Veteran: This has been one of the greatest honors of our life.

(Video bugler plays taps.)

Benson: The volunteer pilots pay between \$400 and \$700 rental fee for the aircraft. The total cost to transport veterans to and from Washington is about \$250 each. The veterans themselves pay nothing.

If you would like to learn more about the Honor Flights go to the Honor Flight Website at [www dot honorflight dot org](http://www.dot.honorflight.org).

Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have been receiving a hero's welcome. Thirty years ago returning Vietnam veterans didn't have the same kind of experience. A recent gathering in Branson, Missouri tried to make up for lost time.

Announcer: They came by truck and car, on motorcycles and in buses, by the tens of thousands. Vietnam Veterans flocking to the Ozark mountain town of Branson, Missouri, for America's first national homecoming celebration honoring the men and women who served in places like Khe Sanh and the Drang Valley.

It was officially billed as "Welcome Home: America's Tribute to Vietnam Veterans."

Jerimiah Carter, Vietnam Veteran: I came all the way from New Jersey just to see this event. When I came back from Vietnam in '65 and '66 we did not get the dues that we deserved.

James R. Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs: I am very proud to be a Vietnam veteran and I want to welcome home my fellow Vietnam veterans.

Announcer: The opening ceremonies on June 13th ushered in a week-long celebration with memorials, music, exhibits and other attractions recalling the era.

Vietnam veteran: I had two years in Vietnam and the last four years driving this thing around the country.

Announcer: Airshows and military simulations brought together the warriors of today with those who fought before.

Many remembered fallen comrades at the "Traveling Vietnam Wall."

Patricia Brashers: The wall that they set up, I think that is a great thing, because not everybody can go to Washington, DC, and see the great big memorial and everything. This gives everybody a chance to honor the fallen soldiers over there.

Chuck Bosnell, Veteran Service Representative: It's really given these guys a chance to come back and find some closure with some of the issues they've been dealing with over the years and meet up with some friends they had back in their units in Vietnam.

Fred Golladay, Vietnam veteran: It seems like Vietnam vets they see each other and just to see somebody and you get a hug and a handshake, it's just great. Something we never got before.

Tom Mueller, Vietnam veteran: And we haven't seen each other in 36 years. We're just really excited and having a wonderful time here and boy it's just been a great thing.

Duane Simpson, Vietnam veteran: I could finally relate something to somebody that understood what I was talking about and I didn't have to hold back because I was afraid of offending somebody.

Ralph Jacob, Vietnam veteran: I did two tours in South Vietnam and this is my first parade since I've been home and I was overwhelmed. I actually cried when we were going down through the parade. It was very nice. Everybody welcomed us home, it was wonderful. This was, it's part of my healing. It's a little bit of closure in my life.

Announcer: The week ended with a star-filled concert featuring The Oak Ridge Boys, Tony Orlando, the Doobie Brothers and other headliners followed by a dazzling fireworks show.

Lenny Vandriel, Dept. of Veterans Affairs: I hope the nation sees that and understands that we are home, we wanted to be welcomed home. We are now being welcomed home and I am grateful for this event to be here today.

Benson: 20,000 participants from all 50 states, Puerto Rico and Australia enjoyed the celebration. If you missed this year's event, mark your calendar for Welcome Home 2006," June 11th through the 18th in Branson.

And as Secretary Nicholson said, "welcome home."

Video Credits: Honor Flight; Operation Homecoming USA.
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